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Address before the Hamp-
den Colonization Society
July 4, 1828, by William
B. Q. Peabody.





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ADDRESS,

DELIVERED AT SPRINGFIELD, BEFORE THE

Hampden Colonization Society,

JULY 4th, 1828.

BY WILLIAM B. O. PEABODY.

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ADDRESS.

The condition and present success of our parent society may be learned from the public prints ; I have therefore thought it more important to try to excite an interest in the subject generally, than to give you a history of their exertions. My subject is, the reason of the imperfect influence of Christianity on the public relations of men. This leads me to speak of Slavery and War ; twin vices, which have grown up together ; which still outlive many abuses that Christianity has overthrown ; and which will not be divided in their fall, when our religion governs in the world.

I may as well say in the beginning, that I am speaking simply of the relation of slavery and the practice of war. I am not complaining of the owners of slaves ; they cannot get rid of them ; it would be as humane to throw them from the decks in the middle passage as to set them free in our country. Neither do I condemn defensive war ; it rests upon the right of self-defence, which individuals possess, and may delegate to governments if they will. I have no taste for sweeping condemnation. I can sympathise with the owners

of slaves, and admire the patriotic defenders of their country, while I detest war and slavery with all my heart.

Some profess to think it surprising that these evils should still exist. Christianity in many a glorious instance has mastered human passions ; it has gained many a victory over hoary abuses, and given liberty, humanity and happiness to men. Still these great scandals of the world exist ; and I think it is *not* surprising that Christianity has not put them down. For in these matters Christianity influences men through the means of men ; it has no authority here more than men choose to allow it, and to say that our religion has not produced its effect is the same as saying what is sadly true, that it has never yet been heartily embraced and cheered onward by men. Our mistake is a very common one ; we think ourselves better than we are ; we take it for granted that we are Christians, and then wonder that our Christianity has so little power. But the real cause of wonder is this ; that men having Christianity, a religion in which all their enduring interests are bound up ; a religion uniting in itself the power of God and the wisdom of God ; a religion containing inducements, which one would say were little short of almighty ; it is wonderful indeed, that men, having such a religion, should do so little to correct their opinions by it and to encourage the feelings it inspires.

When I mention some reasons of the imperfect influence of Christianity, it may appear that there is some deficiency on our part. We have all of us some duties left undone ; and we must remember that we are not to take the voyage of life in a pleasure boat ; we must have some exposure, some efforts and sacrifices to show before we can bear the name of Christian.

The first reason that Christianity has had so little effect upon war and slavery is, that men regard the letter more than the spirit of the religion. They are apt to measure and weigh their duties, that they may learn how far they *must* go; and how much can be left undone. Many have tried to show that these things are not directly prohibited in scripture, taking for granted that every thing not forbidden in so many words, is allowed. This reasoning has had and still has great effect; and yet it would be easy to show that a man might be thoroughly abandoned, without seeming to violate the letter of the Christian law. Christianity does not attempt to push back the rushing torrents of passion; it goes to the fountain head, and checks them when they are just beginning to flow.—*Whence come wars and fightings among you?* If they come from your lusts and passions, Christianity forbids your indulging these passions, and thus prohibits war. It forbids slavery, when it commands men to be just and kind to each other; and this is enough for one who desires to know and to do his duty.

This defence however is a mere evasion. No man criticises in this way the terms of a law which he is well disposed to obey. If a man is resolved to persevere in vice, this is exactly the course he takes to silence others; he shows to them though he does not believe it himself, that the letter of the law is not so strict as they would make it. In this place I need not say that such a measured, half-way obedience to the law of God is not Christianity. The Christian evades nothing, shuts his eyes to nothing, explains nothing away; he traces the broadest possible outline of his duty, and fulfils it to the utmost of his power. The man must be of a different stamp, who does not perceive that the spirit of Christianity is a spirit of free-

dom : that its object is to raise the valley and bring the mountain low, to place men on a level as respects their rights and privileges ; now, to deprive man of his self-direction ; to force him to live, move, and have his being dependent on another's will ; to abridge his means of improvement, and thus cut him off from the higher destiny of man ; to keep his frame in unceasing labour, and condemn his mind to perpetual rest ; such vile bondage of the soul is entirely inconsistent with the spirit of that religion, which directs us to measure the rights and claims of others by our own. It should seem as if man were bound to show some high commission for thus fastening his chains on a body and soul as meanly as his own ; to point out where the command to love his neighbour as himself has been set aside in his favor, or at least, to explain how the sun-burnt shade upon the face, disqualifies the slave for happiness in this world and preparation for the life to come.

Another reason of the limited influence of Christianity is, that it requires great Christian principle to make men abandon vices, and very little to make men disapprove them. They content themselves with simply disapproving their own sins. But do you consider it much, for a man to condemn his own vices ? No such thing ! You know that even the guilty will go as far as this, without the least idea of reforming their lives. Yet we fall into precisely this error in regard to public opinion ; we consider it a matter of triumph when the general sentiment sets strongly against any prevailing sin. A triumph perhaps it is ; but not half so great as we imagine ; for long after men have learned to condemn the public reproach, you find it nevertheless impossible to make them cast it away. The public voice is lifted up against slavery ; against war too,

though less decidedly ; but we must have little experience, if we suppose that mere censure is to destroy them. For where is the condemnation of slavery more general and sincere than in England and the United States ? Yet these two nations hold more human beings in bondage, than all the rest of the civilized world put together ; where can you find the blessings of peace set forth more impressively, than in an unprincipled declaration of war ?

It is mere romance to suppose that the influence of Christianity is felt, when men only cease to condemn their crimes. But if we can see this point gained, it is something ; it may encourage us to redouble our efforts to bring about the desired reform. Still we must not regard the nations as fully persuaded to be Christian, because they tremble for a moment like Felix before the eloquence of Paul ; for though Christianity simply condemns the practice, men, influenced by Christianity, must go so far as to put down the practice ; for right judgement is not the same with right conduct ; and men must act upon their principles, before they can deserve the name of Christians.

A third reason of the limited influence of Christianity is that we consider this point as gained already.—We think that the public feeling is sufficiently alive to the criminality of slavery and war, and that no exertions are necessary to add to the prevailing conviction of their guilt. I must say that we take praise to ourselves too soon. Christianity can do but little to reform the world, if men are so easily satisfied with their success. I look in vain for the proofs of this general condemnation of these gigantic sins. I see on the contrary a lofty and enthusiastic interest everywhere excited by deeds of battle and blood. I see the guilty paths of great destroyers, traced upon the map with

breathless emotion ; I see the finest productions of earthly inspiration growing out of this corruption, like wild flowers from the heaps where the bodies of the slain decay, and the warmest reverence the world can give, lavished on those, who trample most widely and carelessly on the rights and feelings of men. We may say that we admire not the destruction nor the guilt ; not the field shaken with artillery and slippery with blood, but the great intellectual energy displayed in guiding the vast masses of human power ; this will not do ; for great energy should be detested for its alliance with crime, rather than crime be forgiven because united with energy. The public religious feeling must be pronounced unsound, so long as men can admire these splendid sins ; and it is absolutely impossible for one who worships these destroyers, to have any real reverence for the gentle greatness of the Son of God. Still I see this delusion everywhere spread. I see these magnificent outlaws gazed on by Christians with overpowering admiration, while the fair fame of mere defenders of their country seems dull and tame beside them. Even that man to whom this land is more indebted than to any other ; whose name might be pronounced here, without taking the place in vain ; I see that his greatness, beside that of heroes as the world calls them, seems cold and lifeless as the marble from which they have hewn his form.

Neither is public opinion more decided on the subject of slavery. There are not many who will say that the relation of master of slave is defensible in itself, but there is no general sense of the importance of using every endeavour to remove the necessity which is its only justification. Those who visit the southern section of our country generally return with their aversion to slavery much lessened : if they carri-

ed with them an aversion to slave-holders, it is well to have it removed ; for nothing can be more unjust than to censure them for receiving this sad inheritance from their fathers ; but it is not well that they should forget that slavery is an unnatural relation, even in its mildest form. I do not doubt that masters treat their slaves with kindness, nor that the slaves are happier than they could be if set free in this country ; I believe that many a slave-holder would rejoice to throw off the burden ; but they should never forget, that when the necessity which now weighs upon them exists no longer, no humanity on their part will atone for their holding man in bondage ; for, deprive man of freedom, nothing but the animal remains ; and the permission to live is but a poor indulgence after he has lost every thing that made life worth possessing, every thing that distinguishes man made to be immortal, from the beasts that return to the dust from which they sprung.

It must be confessed, that, if there is any general condemnation of war and slavery, it is exceedingly delicate and sparing ; the stern tones of the accuser sink into faintness in front of these old and mighty corruptions ; when, to make himself heard through all the prejudices and follies, interests and passions of men, he should speak in the thunder's voice.

Another obstacle to Christian influences has been, that men have applied a different morality to public and private affairs. In private concerns they profess to follow Christianity ; but in public relations they have made up a different standard of right and wrong ; a standard of interest and convenience, founded on the right of power. Thus we hear measures defended on the ground of necessity, in which there is no necessity, except what oppression creates for itself ; thus, bel-

ligerents claim a right to plunder neutral vessels trading with their enemy ; thus private property is free spoil on the seas, while all civilized nations profess to respect it on shore. In more peaceful relations there have been equally unsocial and unnatural opinions ; thus it was formerly, perhaps is still believed, that one nation could not increase in wealth except in proportion as others lost. We have sometimes heard it suggested that slavery is justifiable in warm climates, because the heat makes it hard for whites to labour ; and that it is right to involve half the world in war, because an insult has been offered to some paltry flag upon a distant sea. This is national honour ; a word which deserves the curse which David breathed upon the mountains where *the mighty had fallen*.

What influence can Christianity have on public relations where such maxims are tolerated or forgiven ? The law of nations is only an enlargement of the rules of justice and kindness that are binding on individuals. Is a man who has a quarrel with a neighbour, justified in preventing all others from trading with that neighbour ? Does any man feel as if he had personally a better right to rob and steal on the water than on shore ? Yet such is the claim of belligerents, and such the piracy which is called privateering and reprisal. Does any one think that there is no such thing as fair exchange between individuals ; that no man can prosper in business except by injuring others ? Does any one think it right to involve all his friends in misery, because some trifling insult has been offered to himself ? Such is the duellist's principle. More profound absurdities than these cannot be imagined ; still they rise up in the world and set bounds to the influence of Christianity. But Christianity requires the same of nations as of individuals ; and if any nation

under pretence of barbarous precedent or selfish interest refuses to submit to it, *that nation's God is not the Lord.*

But one reason of the limited influence of Christianity on public relations perhaps includes all the rest that can be given. Where is there a Christian nation? where is there a community to exert this happy influence? I know that many individuals everywhere are faithful, and there are many regions where religion is honoured and regarded; but I know of none on the face of the earth, where Christian principles govern, nor where the spirit of Christianity prevails against the spirit of selfishness and the world. Where is the fear of God foremost among those thoughts which every day pass over the hearts of men by millions? where do men even think of doing to others as they would have others do to them? What community maintains on the whole such a character as our religion is designed to form? In a Christian country, the law of God should be at least as well obeyed as the law of the land; but if the laws of the land were as often and fearfully broken as those of Christianity, society could not hold together. Christian communities then must not be expected to remove these evils from the world.

Are they to operate through their representatives in national councils? In the first place there is no country but this, where the popular feeling is directly represented; in the second, we have no right to expect representatives to take a higher moral stand than the people who send them. In gathering the collective wisdom of a nation, collective folly must go with it; many legislators without consulting the general welfare will talk of the interests of those who send them, as if they were bound to regard nothing beside, and

meantime will forget to ask what should be the deciding question, is this right or is it wrong? Legislation strongly tends to become partial, malicious, and revengeful; the savage passions of a people rush to concentrate themselves in national halls, like the electric fluid, harmless when diffused among the elements, but terrible when gathered in the thunder-cloud. While such are the tendencies of those assemblies whatever proportion of talent and wisdom they contain, and while public opinion, supposing it to be correct, affects them only by the slow process of changing the material of which they are composed, it must be evident to all, that it is not in national councils, that national improvement must begin.

Some may suppose that these vicious institutions are too firmly established for Christianity to attack them, with any hope of success; that they have a grasp which can never be unclenched from the habits and affections of men. A strong grasp they certainly have even now; but what was it a century ago? The world has outgrown them, and begins to see their folly, if not their guilt. The truth seems to be, that they derive their principal strength at present, from the strange reverence with which men regard them, as institutions founded in the nature of man. There has been neither heart nor hope in the exertions made to put them down.

Look first at war. What rational being thinks that national quarrels are decided, by sending men who know not the provocation, to shoot at each other? they are of course not decided justly; and they are not in fact decided at all. One party may submit from exhaustion; but the difference remains, to be revived at some future time, or give place to some other. War may gratify the passions of nations, but it will not de-

side their disputes ; and in most cases it would be infinitely better for both parties to sit down with their fancied wrongs, than make any attempt to avenge them. It may be asked how will nations decide their quarrels without war ? The answer is, let them learn that their true interests can never be opposed to each other ; and if they cannot believe this, let them settle their disputes as they will ; in any way but this. It is enough to know, that they cannot devise a way more foolish, unchristian, and unsatisfactory than this.

Then look at slavery. It has become so alarming, it is now so evident that at no distant time, unless the order of nature is altered, the slaves must have the power, that all reflecting slave-holders, though they cannot be expected to give up their property, would prefer to have it in a safer form. Now there are painful restraints upon their generosity and kindness ; those who desire the religious improvement of their slaves, naturally fear to enlighten them, when it seems as if the letting in of light to such a race would reveal the secret of their physical strength, and like the candle in the fire-damp of the mine, cause a quick and awful explosion. With the tremendous example of Hayti before their eyes, they would be glad to get rid of their slaves, if you would show them a way ; such a way as this Society, now in its beginning, may at some future time afford them. We are associated in our civil interests with the owners of slaves ; they share our burdens and we must aid them under theirs ; there is guilt at our doors as well as theirs, if something is not done to avert the threatened evil. If something is not done, as sure as the decree of fate, the hour will arrive, which some prophetic voice seems already to foretell. *Oh ! thou that dwellest upon many waters, abundant in treasures ; thine end shall come !*

Said I not rightly that we share the guilt? We are always guilty, if we refuse to aid when evil may be prevented or good may be done. There is a way proposed, which if properly supported, affords some hope of reducing this immense population; not, of course while its means are as at present few and small; but when streams from a million fountains shall swell it into a tide, which, like the great rivers of our country, shall cut its way through the barrier mountains that seem impassable to man. If you say that its resources are too small to effect much, I allow it; and permit me to remind you, that if you give as you are able, its resources will be so much greater. The colony in Africa has been prosperous beyond hope; it affords at least as great a prospect as the infant settlement of New England, of laying the foundation of an enlightened, happy and religious people. But it is so easy and common to call this a visionary plan, that I am content to put it upon that ground. Allow it to be as visionary as its worst enemies would make it; still, if there is the least chance of its affording even to a few of that miserable race, the means of rising to happiness and religion, we are bound to cast in the little offerings of common charity; if the chance was only one in a thousand in favour of its success, still, so long as it requires nothing that we cannot well spare, nothing but what most of us would be the better for sparing, we are not at liberty to balance our doubts against the smallest hope in the cause of God and man.

When I reflect on the prosperity of the people of this country, such prosperity as the world never saw before, there seems to rest upon us a momentous weight of obligation to God. When I see the vast tracts subdued by man from barrenness unto verdure and beauty, and liberally rewarding his care; when I

see the villages gathering their abodes of plenty and peace round the spires that rise like banners of love above them ; when I see the wild streams tamed and led to turn the sparkling wheels of labour ; when I see the sails on every wave of ocean bringing home through their beaten paths the learning and luxuries which our own land fails to supply ; when I see the mighty cities that throng our shores, filled with the refinements of the old world, and far too much of its corruption ; when I think of the vast reach of our country's boundaries, the magnificence of its military preparation, and the navies bearing its thunder to the utmost limit of the deep ; I leave it to others to boast of this growing power ; these things remind me of a responsibility such as never rested upon any people. I look for the gratitude which this unmeasurable blessing should inspire, for mighty efforts in the cause of humanity and religion, at least for an attempt to efface the wide and deep stain that now covers half our country, such as no other Christian nation now tolerates within its bounds.

If our prosperity is growing avaricious, sensual and unfeeling, the fate of a city recorded in scripture may afford us some instruction. Once the ships of every nation were in the harbours of Tyre, and its prosperity seemed set on an everlasting foundation. Now the very ruins cannot be found on the forsaken rock where it stood. There is nothing to exempt us from the fate of others ; vessels of state that sailed as gallantly as ours, have foundered and gone down. When that time shall come, may our country be remembered not by the splendour of its ruins nor the melancholy glory of successful wars. May its vestiges be found in the gratitude of a much injured race, to whom in late atonement, it has given liberty, happiness

and religion ; then the historian of future time, when he turns with disgust from the uniform records of vice and oppression, may find relief in dwelling on our country's annals, and feel his heart burn within him as he writes them down.

Oh ! thou whose holiest name is Love !
 Whose beams of mercy flow
 From all the radiant heavens above
 To bless the world below ;
 Thy kindness, shared by all that live,
 Is most divinely known
 'To those, whose hearts have tears to give
 To sorrows not their own.

While each, beneath thy bounteous hand,
 Some gift of mercy bears,
 Thy love hath blessed our native land
 Beyond our warmest prayers.
 The blessings given to ages past,
 The light they asked in vain
 Are blended in our land at last ;
 An Israel lives again !

Soon as our cry was heard above
 Thy mercy made us free :
 But oh ! how thankless for thy love
 The human heart can be.
 For millions deeper in despair
 Implore our aid in vain,
 When if one spark of heaven were there
 Our hands might rend their chain.

How long shall man resist thee so ?
 'Tis time the hour began
 When hearts shall feel for human woe,
 And man be friends with man.
 Unfailing, boundless, and divine,
 Thy glorious mercy towers !
 And since unwearied love is thine
 May grateful hearts be ours.

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